(b) whether the Navy is adequately prepared to meet the grim threat perception so repeatedly pointed out by him; and

(c) what steps are proposed to ensure optimum operational worthiness and the time schedule fixed for the same?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) to (c) 2/3rd of the Navy warships are normally kept in operational readiness to permit maintenance to be undertaken. However, the Navy has contingency plans to accelerate maintenance so as to have more ships available should the need arise. Navy is adequately prepared to meet any threat.

Army for internal disturbances

1531. SHRI NARENDRA MOHAN: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Army is being overused for internal threats;

(b) if so, whether reaction has been expressed on this issue by the Chief of the Army Staff; and

(c) how many times the army has been used for internal security and tackling insurgency during the last two years?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) Since the end of the decade of the eighties, the deployment of the Army on counter insurgency duties has increased substantially due to the situation prevailing in J&K and some North Eastern States.

(b) The Chief of the Army Staff has expressed concern in this regard.

(c) Units of the Army/Assam Rifles/ Rastriya Rifles have remained deployed for counter insurgency operations in the states of J&K, Assam, Nagaland and Manipur during the last 2 years on a regular basis. Some units have also been deployed in Tripura. In addition, the Army was called out for maintenance of law and order on 5 occasions in 1996, 2 in 1997 and 1 in 1998 in other States.

POWs of 1971 War

1532. SHRI NARENDRA MOHAN: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that 60 armed forces personnel taken as prisoners of war in 1971 Indo-Pak war, are still languishing in Pakistan's prisons;

(b) if so, the reasons for delay in the repatriation of these personnel and what has been the result of our efforts; so far; and

(c) whether Government are proposing to take up the matter at the political level to resolve this humane problem so that mental torture of families of these personnel could come to an end?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) to (c) As per information available, which has been compiled on the basis of various representations received from the family members of the missing defence personnel including representation from Missing Defence Personnel Relatives Association, there appear to be 54 defence personnel as prisoners of war in the custody of Pakistani authorities. As the nodal Ministry for this subject is the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), this Ministry has been requesting MEA to raise the issue at the highest level with Pakistani authorities. MEA, from time to time, had been raising the issue at the Prime Ministerial level and also during the Foreign Secretary level talks. The matter was last raised by the Prime Minister in Male with the Pak Prime Minister in May 1997. Pakistan has, however, been consistently maintaining that there are no prisoners of war in their custody.

The official position in this case is that all the missing defence personnel of 65 and 71 wars, after lapse of 7 years, have